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Political Party Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics in Seven Decades since Founding of PRC: Innovations in Practice and Theory

Summary: Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Communist Party of China has found itself in a complicated international situation and arduous development tasks. The CPC has steadily promoted its foreign exchanges in the process of inheritance and development. It has achieved leaps in practice of the theoretical innovations in party to party diplomacy with Chinese characteristics, which contributed significantly to the central missions of the Party and the nation, as well as the overall strategy of the state diplomacy. Starting at a new historical phase, it is crucial to summarize the experience of the practical and theoretical innovations in party to party diplomacy with Chinese characteristics. It is also of great importance to discover the basic logic and principles therein. All of which would provide practical significance for promoting a benign interaction between the practice and theory of party to party diplomacy, and make greater contribution.

Keywords: Party diplomacy with Chinese characteristics; Innovations in Practice and Theory; historical contribution

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the exchanges between the Communist Party of China (CPC), the ruling party, and foreign political parties naturally evolved into political party diplomacy. Over the past 70 years, in pursuing political party diplomacy with Chinese characteristics, we have fully grasped the historical mission, roles

and positions, endeavored to make explorations in practices, made improvements by reviewing experience, made adjustments and innovations as well as realized the sublimation of theory. Carrying out in-depth research on innovations of practice and theory of political party diplomacy with Chinese characteristics as well as their interactions is conducive to planning new

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developments and breaking new grounds for political party diplomacy in the new era.

Great Leaps in Practices: Historical Perspectives

For the past 70 years, the CPC, the ruling party of a socialist country, with its composure, broad-mindedness and international vision, has fully understood the international situation and tasks of different historical periods. Based on the strategy of major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics, the CPC designed political party diplomacy from an overall and long-term perspective, explored to pursue great development of political party diplomacy following the logic of history and trend of the times, pushed for three major leaps of political party diplomacy and gradually formed the current landscape of political party diplomacy.

First, the fraternal relationship between the CPC and other communist parties as well as working-class political parties from other countries has gradually developed into a normal relationship. After the founding of the PRC, the CPC decided to take the side of the Soviet Union-led socialist camp in light of the international circumstances at that time. In the 1960s and 1970s, the CPC encountered setbacks in its relations with communist parties of some countries and saw a severe shrinking of numbers of political parties willing to have contact with it. Since the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CPC, the CPC has continuously

emancipated its mind and gradually sought to normalize its contact with communist parties and workers' parties of other countries in its practice, and resumed relations with communist parties from regions including Europe, West Asia, North Africa and Latin America and gradually adjusted its relations with communist parties of some Southeast Asian countries. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the upheaval in Eastern Europe, the CPC quickly established contact and maintained normal engagement with the newly established communist parties and renamed left-wing parties of the former Eastern European countries. At present, in dealing with the party-to-party relations with progressive forces such as communist parties and workers' parties, the CPC prioritizes the consistency or similarity of nature, ideas and goals and seeks to broaden consensus, as well as in practice emphasizing safeguarding national interests and security.

Second, the CPC started to establish friendly relations with legitimate political parties of all countries instead of constraining its engagement to communist parties or workers' parties only. For a long time after the founding of the CPC, it only had contact with communist or workers' parties. After the founding of the PRC, there were only sporadic interactions with socialist parties of developing countries. With the international situation evolving, from 1977 the CPC started to establish contact with nationalist democratic parties. Since 1981, the CPC has gradually expanded its exchanges and cooperation with socialist parties of developed countries through establishing connections with

French Socialist Party. Since the 21st century, the CPC has also established relations with different types of emerging political parties in European countries in accordance with new changes of political party politics abroad. Up till now, the CPC has maintained frequent contact with over 600 political parties and political organizations from over 160 countries. An all-round, wide-range and multi-tiered new landscape of political party diplomacy has taken shape. The CPC now has an ever-widening “friends’ circle” covering political parties both in and out of government, government organs and civil society organizations.

Third, the CPC is now giving equal importance to both bilateral exchanges and multilateral ones. After the founding of the PRC, learning the lessons from the just-dissolved Third International, the CPC didn’t join the Soviet Union-led Communist Party-Workers’ Party Intelligence Bureau. Bilateral exchanges were the mainstream foreign exchanges back then. In the mid-1980s, the CPC began to establish contact with the Socialist International and started the process of multilateral exchanges with political parties. After the end of the Cold War, the CPC gradually increased its contact with regional and international political parties and organizations. In the mid-1980s, the CPC began exploring to establish contact with center-right political parties in Europe. Entering the 21st century, the CPC has maintained regular contact with the European Socialist Party, the European People’s Party, the European Left Party, the European Green Party, the Permanent Conference of Political Parties of Latin America

and the Caribbean, the São Paulo Forum and the African Political Parties Council. In 2017, the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties: High-Level Meeting was held in Beijing and gradually institutionalized.

Innovations on Theory: Historical Evolution

The CPC has always attached great importance to developing theory and has continuously strengthened the theoretical exploration of exchanges with foreign political parties. Before the founding of the PRC, through the contact and exchanges with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Communist International, the CPC had initially formed some understandings and principles for dealing with its relationship with fraternal parties.

After the founding of the PRC, the CPC introduced the guiding principles in handling political party diplomacy featuring independence, complete equality, mutual respect and noninterference in each other’s internal affairs, which were formed during the period of revolutionary struggle. It stresses that every political party has the right to decide its own affairs and opposes blindly copying other countries’ experiences. It advocates that all political parties, be they big or small, strong or weak, should be equal. It advocates that political parties of different natures should have mutual tolerance, seek common grounds while reserving differences and conduct cooperation without interfering each

other's internal affairs. It stresses that we should attach importance to proletarian internationalism and international cooperation, and also opposes undermining the legitimate rights and interests of other political parties for the interests of one single country or party.

Since the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CPC, the CPC has seized the momentum of historical development, and explored to work with world political parties to establish a new type of party-to-party relations featuring independence, complete equality, mutual respect and non-interference in each other's internal affairs, contributing to solidifying and sustaining party-to-party relations and state-to-state relations. Besides, the CPC has put forward important guiding principles for major theoretical and practical issues including how to deal with historical legacies in party-to-party relations, how to transcend differences of ideology, how to properly deal with party-to-party and state-to-state relations. At the turn of the 21st century, the CPC put forward the guidelines for the trans-century development of CPC's international work, pointing the directions for advancing political party diplomacy. On that basis, the CPC gradually made clear the position of political party diplomacy, which is not only an indispensable front of CPC's undertakings, but also an important component of China's overall diplomacy. In light of the development of the situation, the CPC further proposed that we should strive to make political party diplomacy an important channel for China to develop its foreign

relations, an important window for displaying the good international image of the CPC, an important platform for officials to observe and study the world, as well as an important channel to draw from other countries' experiences and serve the decision-making of the Central Committee.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy, political party diplomacy has entered a new era in developing theory. Xi Jinping personally participates in guiding CPC's international work and puts forward the general requirements of focusing on political parties, research, connections and image. He proposes that political parties from different countries need to enhance mutual trust, strengthen communication and coordination and explore to build a new type of party-to-party relations featuring seeking common grounds while reserving differences, mutual respect and mutual learning on the basis of a new type of international relations as well as build up a network for political parties to exchange and cooperate in various forms and at different levels. He makes clear that the CPC will never "import" foreign models nor "export" Chinese model, not to mention ask other countries to "replicate" China's practices. Besides, the CPC follows the change of the situation and proposes to build a trinity layout combining political party diplomacy, public diplomacy and civil society diplomacy as well as a mechanism with "great synergy" for political party diplomacy so as to enhance its contribution to the overall national diplomacy.

Innovations on Theory: Prominent Features

First, the CPC has inherited and developed Marxist party-to-party relations. After the founding of the PRC, the CPC creatively combined the basic principles of Marxist party-to-party relations with the situation of China and the CPC, and advocated equality and mutual respect. It opposed the abnormal relations between the “superior party” and the “subordinate party” in the International Communist Movement and emphasized the principles of independence and non-interference in the internal affairs of political parties of other countries. Besides, the CPC creatively enriched and improved Marxist party-to-party relations in light of the changes of the international situation and the theme of the times, making it more modern and scientific, in particular, it broke ideological stereotypes, expanded the diversity of its connections, proposed the principles of complete equality, mutual respect and seeking common grounds while reserving differences in its contacts with all legitimate political parties so that it can better conduct party-to-party exchanges.

Second, the CPC highly responds to the call of the times. In different historical periods, the CPC is always good at grasping the trend of the world and theme of the times, enriching the connotation of political party diplomacy constantly in line with the development and changes of the situation, guiding the practice of political party diplomacy and achieving good results. Since the outbreak

of international financial crisis in 2008, based on the common pursuit of development and better governance as well as the trend of the times where developing countries generally “look eastward”, the CPC has given more prominence to exchange and mutual learning, enhancing the experience exchanges and sharing on party and state governance so as to enhance the capacity of political parties of other countries to govern. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the political party diplomacy community has been acting firmly in maintaining political integrity, thinking in terms of the big picture, following the leadership core, and keeping in alignment with the central Party leadership and having full confidence in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics as well as upholding the authority of General Secretary Xi Jinping and the CPC Central Committee. Guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy, new prospects and new achievements are constantly being made.

Third, the top leader of the party has always guided innovations on theory. The top leaders of a political party are the most important practitioner and promoter of political party diplomacy, for they not only participate in and guide political party diplomacy but also lead theoretical innovations. The top leaders of the CPC are good at summarizing the experience and lessons of political party diplomacy in the turning point of history to advance the development of theory; good at planning the new layout of political party diplomacy in grasping the tide of the times and strengthening the top-level design of diplomacy;

34 | good at addressing the realistic problems in responding to the concerns of the international community and improving the international image of the CPC. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, Xi Jinping attached great importance to the theoretical innovations on political party diplomacy and proposed the theory on political party diplomacy with distinctive features of the times and Chinese characteristics, providing theoretical support for political party diplomacy to better serve the Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions. In 2017, Xi Jinping further illustrated in his keynote address at the opening session of the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties: High-Level Meeting the connotations of a community with a shared future for humanity and ways to build it. He advocated that, on the basis of a new type of state-to-state relations, we should build a new type of party-to-party relations featuring seeking common grounds while reserving differences, mutual respect and mutual learning, ushering a new stage for political party diplomacy for the new era.

Four, innovations on practice and theory complement each other. Over the past 70 years, in the process of advancing political party diplomacy, the CPC has always been goal-oriented, process-oriented and problem-oriented, and has upheld the correct perspectives on the history, the big-picture and its own roles. It has been good at summarizing experience and lessons as well as grasping the trend of development in a historical view, thus promoting the sustainable development of political party diplomacy. In different historical

periods, the CPC has always been exploring the development rules of political party diplomacy, summarizing the useful experiences of party-to-party exchanges, carrying out self-innovation and self-improvement and realizing the sublimation of theory. The interactions of innovations on practice and theory lead to an ever-widening path of political party diplomacy with Chinese characteristics and a bright prospect.

Innovations on Theory: Important Historical Contribution

First, creating a favorable international environment and safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests. On October 1, 1949, the CPC, which had just been declared in power, undertook the historical task of seeking happiness for the Chinese people and rejuvenation for the Chinese nation. In the face of the treacherous international situation with sudden and perplexing changes and the complicated relations between major countries, the CPC needs to make a greater number of closer friends, make great efforts to open up a new prospect of foreign relations and create a favorable external environment. When China's foreign exchanges are at a low ebb, political party diplomacy, through engaging with politicians and leaders of major countries and key countries, can expand the coverage of international exchanges and gradually promote the turnaround of the external environment. In a relatively favorable international environment, the CPC needs to consolidate the groundwork,

continue to expand its global “friend circle”, contribute to the consolidation and expansion of China’s important strategic opportunities. Since the 21st century, in dealing with issue concerning core interests like Taiwan-related, Tibet-related and Xinjiang-related issues, DPRK nuclear issue, the reform of the UN Security Council, South China Sea issue and China-US trade frictions, political party diplomacy has also played its advantages for it is about dealing with people. It can engage in a forward-looking manner through the whole process, thus earnestly safeguarding the national interests.

Second, rising above ideological differences, to achieve the sound development of state-to-state relations. At the beginning of the founding of the PRC, influenced by the strong ideological mentality, the CPC tended to determine whether to have close or distant relations based on the system of a country and the nature of the political party. Such self-limitations had its necessity in a particular historical period, but it will also inevitably bring about negative effects. With the developments of international situation and China’s integration into the world, the CPC has gradually dimmed the influence of ideologies in conducting foreign contacts, enhanced its exchanges with all kinds of legitimate political parties of all countries. It also further realized the synchronized exchanges with mainstream political parties both in and out of government so as to ensure the sound development of state-to-state relations even in scenarios of regime change. In recent years, the CPC has attached

great importance to the emergence of new political parties in Europe and has increased its contact with them, enhancing the mutual friendship and achieving positive results. The emerging political parties in some southern European countries such as Italy and Greece, after their coming into power, enhanced their cooperation with the CPC, regarded China as and haven been more active and enthusiastic in the Belt and Road cooperation.

Third, playing the role of a major political party of a major country to provide public goods with Chinese characteristics for the international community. As the governing party of a major socialist country and the biggest developing country, the CPC has always been given high attention and anticipation by the international community. For example, many developing countries hope to learn from China’s measures to realize modernization and draw from the CPC’s experiences of party building as well as to develop the international order towards greater justice and fairness together with the CPC. In the 21st century, especially since the outbreak of international financial crisis in 2008, the international community has given greater hope to China for its greater contribution to advancing development, safeguarding world peace and promoting global governance. The high anticipation and expectation is undoubtedly an important driving force for the innovations on theories of political party diplomacy. In different periods of history, the CPC has always paid great attention to responding to the call of the international community and has provided effective international public good in a timely

manner. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the CPC has been active in contributing Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions to the international community, pulling extensive consensus through in-depth exchanges and dialogues, guiding the international public opinion and thus enhancing the international soft power of the CPC.

After 70 years of ups and downs, political party diplomacy with Chinese characteristics is now in a new era of innovation, exploration and vigorous

development. Standing at the new historical starting point, the international work of the CPC will, under the centralized and unified leadership of the CPC Central Committee, have more scientific planning on the basis of its own and duties, give full play its institutional advantages of “great synergy”, open new prospects and break new grounds for political party diplomacy so as to make new and greater contributions for realizing the two centenary goals and the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation.